Strategy Research Project

A DROWNING MAN'S UMBRELLA QUEST: AMERICA'S SEARCH FOR IRANIAN POLICY

BY

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Based on the combination of the historic relationship and the current preferences that orient US policy towards Iran, it is highly probable that the peoples of the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran will engage in a regional war before 2020 if nothing changes in the approach of the United States. This paper argues that by examining the conditions of US decline in the context of a US - Iranian regional power struggle, systemically different recommendations could be made concerning US interests and Iran.

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Based on the combination of the historic relationship and the current preferences that orient US policy towards Iran, it is highly probable that the peoples of the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran will engage in a regional war before 2020 if nothing changes in the approach of the United States. This paper argues that by examining the conditions of US decline in the context of a US - Iranian regional power struggle, systemically different recommendations could be made concerning US interests and Iran.

A DROWNING MAN'S UMBRELLA QUEST: AMERICA'S SEARCH FOR IRANIAN POLICY

Despite declarations of US sanctions against Iran in 2008, President Barack Obama came into office believing there was an opportunity to dissuade Iranian nuclear aspirations by offering a new approach to US-Iranian strategy.[1] In a September 2009 conciliatory gesture, the United States sought to reverse mistrust by meeting with Iran.[2] Disregarding years of developments between the two countries, Iran was expected to just as swiftly receive the new US Administration as a new beginning. The premise of the new approach was to integrate Iran into the world economy for compromises on its nuclear program. Even under skepticism by his own administration, the President sought to change the approach to Iran through a policy of "engagement."[3]

The first expression of this approach came in a message to the Iranian people on the occasion of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, March 19, 2009. President Obama stated that "the United States is now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full range of issues before us, and to pursuing constructive ties among the United States, Iran, and the international community."[4] He also constrained diplomatic efforts by stating that the United States would not seek "regime change."[5] In support of that approach, Administration officials did not openly advocate military options.

Iran's brutal reaction to protests beginning in December 2009 would test the new policy.[6] Frustration would result in a change to the US tone of appeasement as President Obama publically criticized Iran's refusal of US diplomatic overtures in the 2010 Nowruz message.[7] This attitude would culminate by July 2010. After approving tough sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, President Obama would

noticeably not comment against Israeli air strikes on Iran. He indicated that the US preferred a diplomatic solution, but offered a familiar quote: "I assure you, I have not taken options off the table."[8]

Indications of the policy's failure were evident six months before the President's July comments. In January 2010, the Pentagon warned the White House that the United States does not have an effective long-range policy for dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue. As a result, the National Security Adviser, General James L. Jones, would begin to develop new policy alternatives that included revised military options should diplomacy and sanctions fail.[9] Less than one year after a noble expression of hope, the policy of diplomatic engagement with Iran would result in only harsh sanctions and intense rhetoric.

After learning that the United States would not assist pro-democratic movements in 2010, an Iranian protestor would attempt to describe the paradox and bewilderment of the US message. "They [the United States] are like the drowning man who spends the final moments of his life looking for an umbrella. For years [the United States] encouraged [us] to take to the streets... now [the United States] supports our government?"[10]

As insinuated in this paper's title, an enormous amount of resources have been spent during the 'umbrella quest' to find a solution to the problem of Iran. Still the questions arise; "Why can't the United States and Iran normalize relations? And if so; "How could the United States formulate a strategic architecture that allows polices to stabilize the region?" These questions continue to rise because answers are superficial descriptions of what the "United States wants the Middle East to be" rather than

prescriptions that will make a stable region. Portrayed as separate policies, outcomes like 'access to regional oil' and 'a non-nuclear Iran' excludes important conditions that, if addressed, could solve issues underlying the sum of the Iranian problem. Partitioning policies also compartmentalizes and constrains US instruments of power. In the end, the current answers to these questions are no more than stars to steer by.

The 2010 shift back towards enacting sanctions on Iran, indicates that the Obama Administration is now beginning to comprehend that the direction of the US-Iranian relationship is not a course that is plotted standing still. It is actually a trajectory driven by the very powerful and dynamic force of history. Given this feature, each step taken along this particular trajectory makes it more difficult to reverse course. The enactment of recent sanctions only reinforces decades of suspicion and enmity. As demonstrated in this return hard-line policy, the cost of switching to a peaceful preference rose to a risk that makes a reasonable alternative to conflict irrelevant.[11]

The declaration that "history matters" is often invoked, but rarely unpacked in policy formulation.[12] This has been evident in the US-Iranian relationship to date. From multiple administrations of different political parties, US policies towards Iran share two distinct characteristics.[13] First, Iranian policies have started small in scope, but always reinforce negative perceptions that bring unintended consequences. Second, US policy towards Iran makes grand entrances that erode over time because it does not possess characteristics that generate not just initial success, but substantial resilience over time.[14] If this trajectory is not changed, this research concludes that the United States and Iran will likely engage in a regional war between the dates of 2014 and 2020.

By approaching policy as something distinct from the way in which political actors *select* policies at a moment in time to serve their needs, the certainty of war can change. In the short lived engagement policy, President Obama was ill served by strategists that were preoccupied with the *moment* of policy choice and directed him towards the dramatic and away from the important.[15] By using the temporal concept of path dependence, policy developments can be made to alter the trajectory of US-Iranian conflict. New policy options can be placed on a trajectory that can prescribe revisions to normalize the US-Iranian relationship by constructing a narrative of continuity and change that is attentive to order and sequence.

Principles of Policy Development: Time and Structure

The policy framework for this paper was constructed from two reputable and contemporary models on the causes of conflict. The sources of these concepts are found in *Politics in Time* by Paul Pierson and Dale Copeland's, *The Origins of Major War*. Combined together, their ideas on path dependence and dynamic differential theory were valuable in finding promising alternatives to US policy on Iran.

Pierson's work *Politics in Time* recognizes that most polices unconsciously take a snapshot view of the strategic environment. He contends that the real meanings of events are distorted when they are ripped from their context. Pierson argues that placing politics in time vastly enriches the understanding of international conflicts, and greatly improves the mechanisms to solve them. This concept is *path dependence.* It means "that what happened at an earlier point in time will affect the possible outcomes of a sequence of events occurring at a later point in time."[16] Path dependence also describes the high price that is paid when leaders ignore the profound effects of time on

policy development. The goal is to find policy options through a process that is based on the declaration that "history matters."[17] A narrower conception follows:

> ...Once a country... has started down a track, the cost of reversal is very high. There will be other choice points, but the entrenchments of certain arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice. Perhaps the better metaphor is a tree... From the same trunk, there are many branches and smaller branches. Although it is possible to turn around or to clamber from one to the other, the branch on which the next climber begins is the one they tend to follow from the first climber.[18]

A crucial feature of path dependence is identifying the common characteristics of reinforcing actions that define a state's trajectory. Histories distinguished by sanctions, deterrence and crisis, create a trajectory characterized as conflict. Once this quality becomes too powerful, reversal is impossible because benefits of current hard-line actions outweigh other options. The trajectory can only move forward through an "irreversible branching process."[19] Past hard-line actions are amplified to predict a time period where conflict may turn to a state of war.

With policy reversal no longer an alternative, this is a predicted moment in time where two branches of the same path forward are available to a state. First, follow the trajectory and wage war to forcefully redirect the relationship towards peace. The second would be to seek to avert war through an expensive and time consuming route of implementing new actions without risking the benefits of old ones. The fact is, to be successful, a state must do both.

Once a war can be predicted with certainty, a state must implement policies that would make both branches possible without actually choosing one over another. A state cannot afford to sacrifice preparation for a highly certain war while just focusing on creating the *possibility* of a new reality. Just as remiss would be to deliberately not create an opportunity for long term stability because of the convenience existing of short

term benefits from hard-line actions. Active mechanisms must be implemented *during* the policy development process. On an intense conflict trajectory, states must prepare for a likely war; reduce the probability of that war occurring; and at the same time create the possibility of an alternate reality of peace. The *absence* of a leader's decision is critical to the success of policy development during this time period. When the time does come for a leader to decide based on this feedback, ultimate selection of a successful policy is increased with little or no frustration or risk to the state.

This time period is defined as a *critical juncture.* As described above, they can be recognized in the future as opportunities for major reforms or discovered in examinations of the past as causes for conflict. They are qualified as "critical" because the arrangements of policies at that point will create new paths or intensify qualities of the current path from that time forward.[20] This makes critical junctures important elements of a strategic architecture. If the full range of policy options can be sequenced and arranged before entering a critical juncture, the chances of success increase. Yet, with no additional structure to policy development, a timeline that identifies and predicts when a conflict will unfold is insufficient.

Dale Copeland's, *The Origins of Major War* provides the structure for use in developing strategies that will address future certainties while creating new realities. Theoretically complete, Copeland synthesizes ideas about the origins of wars into a structure called *dynamic differential theory*.[21] He begins with identifying the one factor that drives states regardless of their particular ideology: power. Dividing the notion of power into three sub-types; military, economic and potential influence, he shows how decline in any of these areas may dictate a state's behavior.[22] With convincing evidence

he shows that wars tend to be preventive actions initiated by dominant states fearful of decline.[23] His assertion is that a state in decline will be more open to see war as a logical tool to maintain power. Copeland predicts that these wars are more likely in a geographic region of important or vital interest to the dominant state. Combining these ideas also explains why states might continue hard-line actions that greatly increase the risk of an escalation to war while still preferring peace.[24]

The theory offers three assumptions for policy development. First, assuming states are rational security-seeking actors, it is the militarily superior state in decline that is most likely to start a war. Second, in a bipolar distribution of power the declining state can attack even when roughly equal and the probability of war is increased because the attacker is not limited to just the superior state. Third, the probability of war increases when decline is seen as both deep and predictable. A consideration of overall economic and potential power is crucial in determining the extent of military power decline.[25] The logic is that if the United States finds itself in decline, it should worry that if Iran rises; it will either attack the United States later or coerce it into concessions that will compromise US security.

Foreign Policy Development Framework

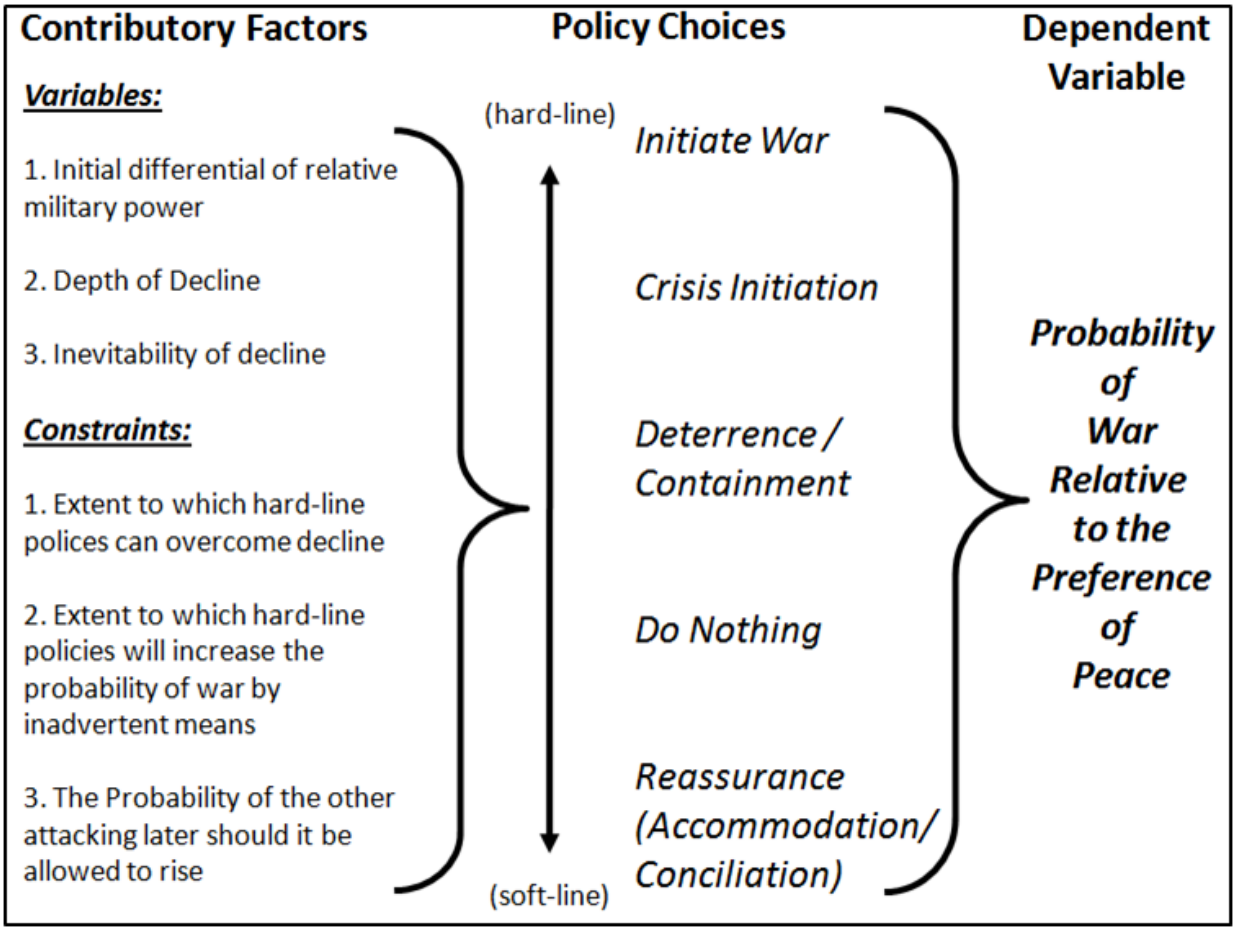

Figure 1: Foreign Policy Development Process[26]

The model in figure 1, Foreign Policy Development Process, is a framework that outlines the discussion concerning each policy choice in relation to its impact on the probability of war between the United States and Iran. While the framework is primarily from Copeland's *The Origins of Major War*, the principles of path dependence guide the discussion by constantly relating it back to time. Because the United States currently prefers peace to war with Iran, options along the hard and soft line spectrum will be measured in how they keep the probability of a US-Iranian war low over time.

For simplicity, five policy options are considered: direct initiation of war; crisis initiation deterrence/containment; doing nothing; and accommodation and conciliation.[27] Clearly if the United States chooses to initiate war against Iran, the probability of war is 100 percent, since we can assume that Iran, when attacked, will fight to protect itself. If the United States selects less extreme policies, this does not mean the probability of major war is zero. Options that emphasize hard-line policies like general containment strategies raise the likelihood of war through escalation or accident.[28]

Even if Iran's future intentions may seem important, Iran's current preferences and diplomatic actions are assumed to be largely irrelevant to US policy development. The United States will act on how it perceives various external conditions. This assumption not only makes the analysis more credible; it also approximates reality.[29] The United States knows that Iran, regardless of whether it possesses aggressive or simply security-seeking motives, has an incentive to send conciliatory signals to buy time and rise in power.[30] Iran's actions are irrelevant because the United States is expected to dismiss these signals as peripheral to its main concern: its declining power in the Middle East and the possibility of a future conflict with a nuclear armed Iran.

Structuring Time in Foreign Policy Development

Before going into contributing factors, there is much to be gained in explaining that *when* things happen, reinforces *how* the US-Iranian conflict will unfold.[31] Unpacking events and purposely arranging them is fundamental to the convincing claim that war with Iran is certain if there is no policy change. Yet, to assert that this certainty of war is "frozen" on course is hardly credible. A transition to peace can occur but it is bounded until the mechanisms that reproduce and reinforce conflict are eroded. The policy development process described in the next section provides an instrument to

understand factors contributing to conflict reinforcement and identify means to reduce the probability of war and alter the future of US-Iranian relations.[32]

"War and peace with Iran: what's the difference?" At one level, the question can be quickly dispensed with: peace is the opposite of war.[33] A conventional model of war portrays it as a conflict between two sides with opposing aims. These aims are typically presented as 'political': the aim is seen as furthering the political interests of a state. This is war as a continuation of politics by other means, as Clausewitz famously noted.[34] The obvious way is to secure a compromise between the opposing political aims of the two states. Another is simply for one side to secure an outright victory. The US-Iranian history is so defined by intense hostility and aggression that it cannot be recognized as peace in any context. Because of this, there is a debatable but convincing perspective that the two countries are already at war.[35]

Yet, policy makers not afforded the luxury of simply picking between peace and war with Iran. The fact is the problem would be much easier to address if the countries were at war and that is not the case. The 2003 invasion of Iraq proved that regional wars are devastating and have global impacts. In a region defined with a nuclear armed Iran and the potential proliferation of that technology, a war with Iran could be the last war for the globe.[36] As a result, war is a reality, but peace is still the preferred choice.

The temporal ordering of historic events and predictive actions will have a significant impact on whether the US-Iranian relationship results in peace or war. Identifying the specific reinforcing actions between the two countries that are most persistent over time is important to policy development. These actions become

continuities over time are the striking feature of the relationship. In the case of the United States and Iran, that feature is conflict.

The starting point for studying this conflict will be the ordering and arrangement of the US-Iranian timeline. In particular, the arrangement of the reinforcing actions defined as military hostility and diplomatic coercion linked through time. Figure 2 was selected as a framework because it organizes the actions of conflict onto 'pathways' to critical junctures rather than a one dimensional timeline. To say that timing matters implies the timing of something *relative to something else*. In this case, the US-Iranian actions of conflict over time are linked together so that they are relative the initiation of war in highly consequential ways.[37]

In an international political system created by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States finds itself the hegemonic power in a unipolar world.[38] Since then, the United States has done what others have done and divided the map of the known world into regions and organized its international affairs as such.[39] In these regions, the United States is able to compartmentalize its balance of power relationships in micro systems to maintain its status in the overall international system.

For instance, although the United States has no true equal in the global system, it does have two potential challengers to its interests in the Asia region; India and China.[40] In Europe, it is the European Union and Russia. Venezuela and Brazil are identified in South America. In each of these cases the relationship is defined as regionally 'multilateral.' Because power balances between three states, the chances for a regional war are less because the dynamic power differential lends itself to nonviolent

conflict resolution or allows for a proxy between the United States and direct confrontation. This is not the case in the Middle East region.[41]

The first assumption for this variable is relatively straightforward. Because wars are so costly and risk the survival of the state, the initiator of a war between Iran and the United States is assumed to be the United States. Iran, with its less superior military simply lacks the capability to take on the United States as the aggressor. Moreover, it would be irrational for Iran to begin a war while still rising, since waiting allows it to compete against US influence at less future cost. As a result, policy development should be formulated to address the high probability of a regional war that would have to be started by the United States to prevent Iran from rising to challenge US vital interests.[42]

The second assumption is that because the regional system is bipolar, the probability of preventive war is likely to increase as the two states are near equals in regional military power.[43] With Iraq removed from the regional power distribution, the United States will find it rational to go to war with Iran - even if the war is long and difficult - because there are no other challengers to defeat after victory is achieved. A successful bid for unopposed access to energy resources is easier to achieve than ever before. In the Middle East, the United States knows that even if a coalition forms against its attack, the states joining Iran are unlikely to alter the expected outcome.

Third is the assumption that the United States realizes the two factors described above create a favorable situation for war now and that its projected troop withdrawals make it difficult to constrain Iran after it achieves some sort of asymmetrical superiority.

This improvement could be the realization of its nuclear weapon aspirations or the discovery of an oil source that would surpass Saudi capacity.

Fourth, the United States knows that other states in the region, even if some are willing to ally against Iran, are not substantial enough in power to shore up the impending security dilemma. US partners such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia are preoccupied with internal issues of their own. Some are even experiencing government change that puts their US relationship in question. No Arab state could serve as a regional proxy to challenge Iranian military power absent the United States. Unlike in the past, a state like Iraq is not available to match Iranian power.

A bipolar distribution of power relationship is visually summarized as it relates to path dependence in figure 2. This figure presents the situation that states face in a bipolar system. At times t(1), t(4), and t(5), the probability of major war should be low, since the trends in the military balance and advantage are stable. With neither state experiencing decline, there is no imperative to go to war for security reasons. As the dominant state begins to decline in t(2) the likelihood of war is high because there is no restraining presence of a third power. A critical juncture, policies in place at this time will characterize the trajectory until the next juncture.

The results of these policies and actions can lead to a relationship defined as conflict or cooperation. This time period is brief and returns to only a moderate chance of war as states consolidate losses or gains in the power transition.

The model derives its explanatory value in its portrayal the critical juncture defined by t(6), t(7) and t(8). At t(6) and t(7), when there is a marked inequality, decline should make war highly likely if influence is to be maintained or denied from a

challenger. The probability of war at t(8) increases by exponents relative to the depth and inevitability of the dominant state decline because the loss of influence will be concurrent with the decline.

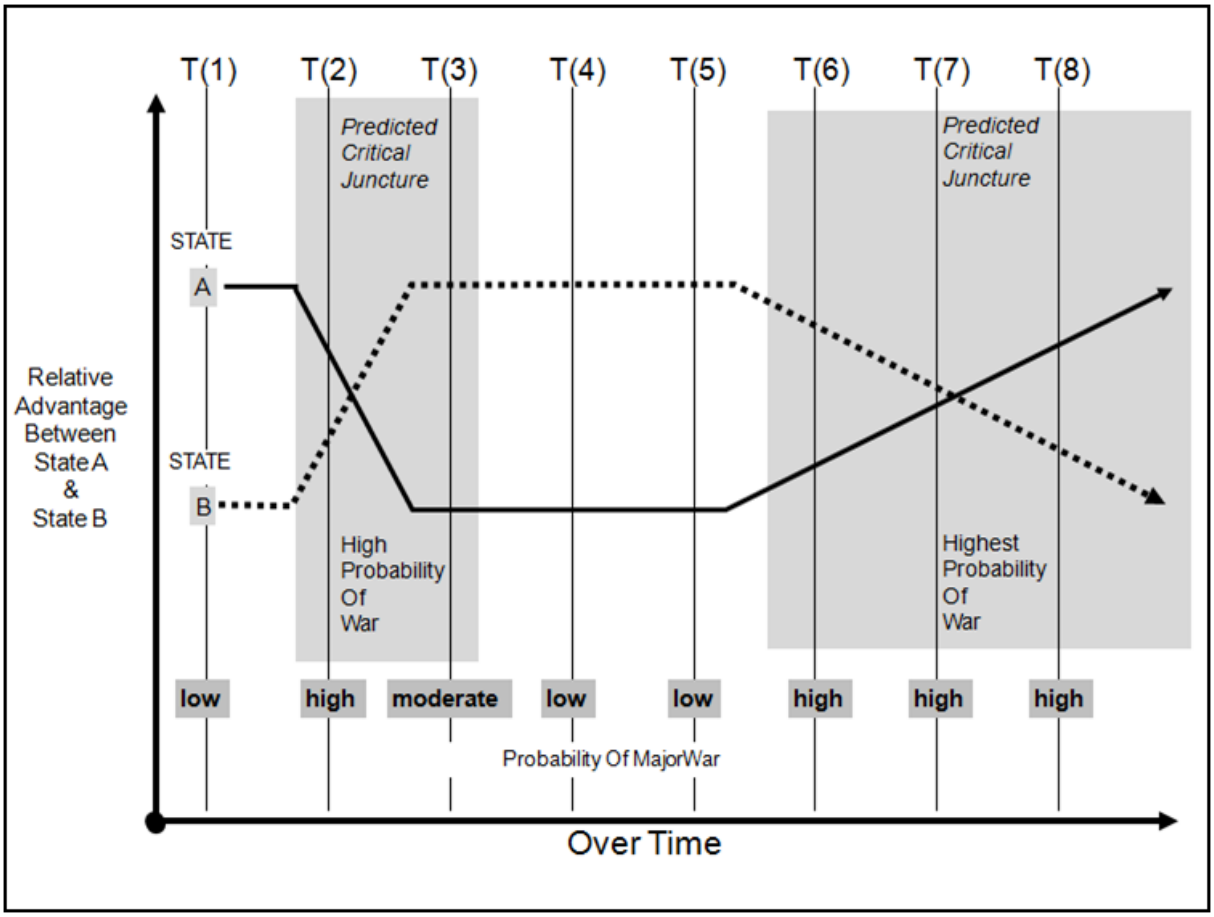

Figure 2: Relative Military Advantage & the Probability of War: Bipolar Relationship[44]

Defining the Problem: The Trajectory to War with Iran

US policy trajectory towards war with Iran is dependent on a long path of US decisions that were made to gain influence and unobstructed access to regional oil resources after the 1970s energy crisis.[45] The energy crisis was a period in which the major industrial states, particularly the United States, faced shortages of petroleum. The two worst crises of this period were the 1973 oil crisis, caused by the Arab Oil Embargo

of Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and the 1979 energy crisis, caused by the Iranian Revolution.[46] However, the origins of US-Iranian conflict are found twenty years before the oil crisis of the 1970s.

In an act of aggression, the United States would overthrow the democratically elected government of Iran in 1953. Whether motivated by the desire to stop the spread of communist or the need to access affordable oil, the 1953 coup would be the event to start the path towards war.[47] A powerful force throughout the trajectory, it is a primary cause of the Iranian population's enmity towards the United States.[48]

In 1953, under the orders from President Eisenhower, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) organized a military coup that overthrew Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh.[49] Displeased that Iran nationalized its oil industry, Britain planned the coup and approached the United States. Soon after, they would mount a combined operation to remove the Prime Minister.[50]

For years, the United States denied any involvement in the coup, but in 2000, then Secretary of State Madeline Albright admitted, "In 1953, the United States played a significant role in orchestrating the overthrow of Iran's popular Prime Minister... the coup was clearly a setback for Iran's political development... it is easy to see now why so many Iranians continue to resent any intervention by America in their internal Affairs."[51]

This action has reinforced other action of conflict throughout the US-Iranian relationship and is the reason for the lack modern US-Iranian dialog. The origins of the 1979 seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran can be linked to the 1953 coup. The hostage takers openly admitted that their actions were connected to the coup. "You have no right to complain, because you took our whole country hostage in 1953." Some

Iranians involved would later admit that they participated in the action because they were concerned that the United States may have been plotting another coup. Much risk is incurred by policy that ignores the coup's effect on the US-Iranian relationship.

In January 1979, time period t(1) on the model in figure 2, the Middle East balance of power relationship could be defined by the actions of Iran and Iraq.[52] At the beginning of this time period, Iran would be seen as the dominant state. Since the 1950s, the United States had sold Iran advanced weapons and trained its military. The objective was to ensure that Iran had a distinct military advantage over its regional competitors so that the United States had access to the region's oil resources. In late January 1979, Iran's power decline began when the US-backed Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was forced to leave Iran.[53]

With the Islamic nationalist and anti-American Ayatollah Khomeini's ascent to power, Iran declared itself a theocratic republic and a critical juncture in the relationship began. After Iranians stormed the US embassy in Tehran, the United States would cut diplomatic relations with Iran and impose the first in a series of sanctions. With the country in revolution, a freeze on economic assets and the loss of its major military contributor, Iran would start its decline as a regional power. This decline would create conditions for a challenger to rise in power. Because of the balance of power in the region, Iraq would be that challenger.[54]

Iraq would invade in order to take advantage of Iran's power decline and domestic chaos caused by revolution. In September 1980-t(2), After years of territorial disputes, Iraq announced its intentions to reclaim the disputed Shatt al Arab waterway. Seeing its own regional decline in the 1970s loss of an Iranian partner, the United

States sought to contain the new Iranian regime by exerting its influence through Iraq's rise to power. Identifying an opportunity to reinsert itself into the region, the United States ultimately gave the final approval to invade. Former Secretary of State Alexander Haig stated that "President Carter gave the Iraqis a green light to launch the war against Iran through Prince Fahd of Jordan."[55]

In 1982, concerned by Iranian success on the battlefield, the United States made its backing of Iraq more pronounced. The United States would normalize relations with Iraq, supplying it with economic aid, military training, operational intelligence and weapons. Afraid "Iraq might actually lose" the war, the Reagan administration would sign National Security Decision Directive 4-82 that would remove Iraq from a list of State Sponsors of Terrorism to ease the transfer of dual-use technology to Iraq.[56]

Throughout the 1980s, as Iranian forces gained an upper hand, the United States launched covert operations to assist Iraq. Weapons were sent via CIA fronts in Chile and Saudi Arabia directly to Baghdad.[57] In 1983, the US administration would identify the success of Iraq as so strategically vital that it would violate its own Arms Export Control Act by sending Iraq howitzers, Huey helicopters and bombs.[58] In July of 1984, the CIA gave Iraq specific intelligence necessary to calibrate its mustard gas attacks on Iranian offensive operations.[59] Between 1986 and 1988, some seventy-three transactions took place that included bacterial cultures to make weapons-grade anthrax, advanced computers; and equipment to repair jet engines and rockets.[60]

This deadlock in policy would be summarized in a November 1983 national security directive that stated that the United States would do "whatever was necessary and legal" to prevent Iraq from losing its war with Iran.[61] So entrenched in its policy, the

United States would violate both domestic and international norms, laws and obligations to confront the threat of a change in status quo that a powerful Iran presented.

Howard Teicher served on the National Security Council and would accompany the later US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to Baghdad in 1983. According to his 1995 affidavit, the CIA secretly directed armaments to Iraq through false fronts and third parties such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Kuwait, and they encouraged rouge arms dealers and other private military companies to do the same:

> The United States actively supported the Iraqi war effort by supplying the Iraqis with billions of dollars in credits, by providing US military intelligence and advice to the Iraqis and by closely monitoring third country arms sales to Iraq to make sure that Iraq had the military weaponry required. The United States also provided strategic operational advice to the Iraqis to better use their assets in combat... the CIA, including both director Casey and Deputy Director [now Secretary of Defense] Gates, knew of, approved of, and assisted in the sale of non-US origin military weapons, ammunition and vehicles to Iraq.[62]

The United States' stance and support of Iraq's use of chemical weapons against Iran may best define the extreme nature of its preferences towards Iran. As early as November 1983, George Shultz, then Secretary of State, would be given intelligence reports showing Iraqi troops are daily using chemical weapons against the Iranians. US companies would be shown to have assisted Iraq's acquisition of banned materials to support the program.[63]

On the diplomatic front, the United States would ensure Iraq had the freedom of action it needed in the international community to prevail over Iran. In 1984, Iran introduced a draft resolution to the UN Security Council, citing the Geneva Protocol of 1925, condemning Iraq's use of chemical weapons. In response, the United States lobbied friendly states to take "no decision" on Iraq's use of chemical munitions. The United States would protect Iraq’s actions by arguing that the UN Human Rights

Commission was an "inappropriate forum" for consideration of such abuses. The US National Security Council eventually issued a "Presidential Statement" condemning the use of unconventional weapons "without naming Iraq."[64]

In a January 14th 1985 memorandum, the State Department acknowledges the United States shipment of "dual-use" export hardware and technology to Iraq. The list of items included civilian items such as heavy trucks, communications gear and technology that could be used in making chemical weapons. About two of every seven licenses for export of "dual use" technology items approved between 1985 and 1990 by the US Department of Commerce "went either directly to Iraqi armed forces, to Iraqi end-users engaged in weapons production, or to Iraqi enterprises suspected of diverting technology" to weapons of mass destruction.[65] The use of chemical weapons was not a matter of "deep strategic concern" to The United States because it was "desperate to make sure that Iraq did not lose."[66]

No other event would display the special status of Iraq to the United States than the USS Stark incident in May of 1987. An Iraqi jet fighter would mistakenly attack the USS Stark killing 37 servicemen. Yet, Washington would remain focused on isolating Iran by accepting Iraq's apology, and in the same press conference criticize Iran's mining of international waters. The following statement summarizes the irony best, "the only country to have been granted the 'privilege' of attacking a US warship and getting away with it, other than Israel in 1967, is Iraq."[67]

On April 14, 1988, the frigate USS Samuel B. Roberts struck an Iranian mine and was badly damaged. US forces responded with the naval Operation Praying Mantis. Two Iranian war ships were destroyed.[68] This attack was important in that it would be

the coercive action that would ultimately pressure Iran to agree to a 1988-t(4) ceasefire with Iraq. With military improvements and the economic opportunities brought by an improved relationship with the United States, Iraq would rise from the tactical stalemate of the war to a position of strategic advantage in the region.

In response to Iranian attacks on oil tankers and mining of the Persian Gulf, the US Navy would deploy a significant force to the region.[69] The naval battles fought between the US and Iranian navies would be the largest fought since the Second World War.[70] The distinction would be that these battles would remain localized and limited in scope to the sea domain. Yet they had consequences to US credibility in the region.

On July 3, 1988, in the course of escorting tankers, the cruiser USS Vincennes would shoot down Iran Air Flight 655 killing all 290 civilians on board. The American government said that the airliner had been mistaken for an Iranian F-14 Tomcat. Claims were that the USS Vincennes was operating in international waters and feared that it was under attack.[71] US Admiral William Crowe later acknowledged on ABCs Nightline that the Vincennes was inside Iranian territorial waters when it launched the missiles.[72]

Four major land battles would be fought from April to August 1988 between Iraq and Iran. In each, the Iraqis massively and effectively used chemical weapons to defeat the Iranians.[73] Nerve gas and other blister agents were used in addition to mustard gas.[74] By this time, the US defense Intelligence Agency was heavily involved with Iraq in battle plan assistance, intelligence gathering and post battle debriefing. In the last major battle of the war, 65,000 Iranians are killed, 20,000 with poison gas.[75] Only days after this battle and US Navy attacks on the Iranian Navy, Iran would accept UN Security

Council Resolution 598, leading to a cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq War. The entrenched policy taken up by the Americans for security driven goals had prevailed.

From 1988-t(4) until 1990-t(6) Middle East stability, or lack thereof, would be defined by the new relationship between Iraq and Iran. The United States would tolerate the actions of each state as the United States continued to have unimpeded access to oil resources. On a global scale, instability in the Middle East would be endured in the context of how it supported the status quo between the United States and the USSR. Issues like Iraq's use of chemical weapons on its own civilians were seen as an opportunity to demonize Iran further. When the Iraqi military killed 5,000 people in the town of Halabja the US Administration actually sought to obscure Iraqi culpability by suggesting that the Iranians may have carried out the attacks.[76]

In October 1989-t(5), The Bush Administration would formalize Iraq's strategic importance to the United States by signing National Security Directive 26, which began, "Access to Persian Gulf oil and the security of key friendly states in the area are vital to the US national security." With respect to Iraq, the directive stated, "Normal relations between the United States and Iraq would serve our longer term interests and promote stability in both the Persian Gulf and the Middle East."[77] With the support of Iraq, the United States would once again have a powerful partner in the region and assured access to its resources. On July 25th 1990, the US Ambassador met with Saddam Hussein to assure him that the United States "wanted better and deeper relations".[78]

At this time, the amplifications of the United States' actions concerning both Iran and Iraq began to show in the regional balance of power. In a series of events in just over thirty years, the United States helped create a regional rivalry between two states

of such military power that a third state such as Saudi Arabia or Jordan would find it impossible to compete.

Before the 1979 Revolution, the United States was Iran's foremost economic and military partner. This facilitated the modernization of Iran, with 30,000 Americans residing in the country in a consulting capacity. During this time, Iran would grow to considerable power and influence.[79] Once it changed its orientation with regards to the United States, Iran's power was considered an extreme threat to US interests. To counter the power it had created in Iran, the United States would have to take extreme measures to create an equal power in Iraq. There was risk in this approach. If Iran or Iraq was to face a significant decline, there would be no other state to fill the void. The one left standing would be the regional power dictating the rules for access to oil.

During the Cold War, the power of the United States to act towards either Iraq or Iran was constrained by the countervailing interests and strengths of the Soviet Union. With regards to the Middle East, the United States could act, but it always had to anticipate and compensate for a reaction from the Soviets. This Cold War dynamic mitigated the risk of an imbalance of power of either Iraq or Iran.[80] The United States' support to Iraq would compensate for the benefits of Iran's new relationship with the Soviet Union. Regional challenges for power would be tolerated in the context of the US-Soviet relationship. It was also understood that the superpowers would not allow Iraq or Iran to decline.

In 1990-t(6) global events would unfold that would change the international system to what it is today. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the US administration would call for a 'new world order' and define the next critical juncture in the trajectory to

war with Iran.[81] Indeed, in the new global environment, not only was the power of the US leadership unprecedented, it was also unanticipated. In a system in which the legitimacy of the leaders derives from the consent of the governed, American leaders found that they were now making decisions affecting the lives and fortunes of billions, who did not choose them. The United States found itself the leader of the global community, crowned by history and circumstances but lacking the confirmation of any global referendum on the matter.[82]

That referendum would come when the world would call upon the United States to maintain stability in the 'new world order.' In August of 1990, just one month after the US Ambassador would urge "better and deep relations" with Iraq, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. With the Soviets still in the picture but in very steep decline, the world waited to see if the United States would turn on its Cold War proxy and take its position as a global leader. When the United States decided to act at the world's request, two important balance of power relationships changed. First, the international system had become unipolar defined by an unchallenged US rise to a global position of advantage. Second, this period would mark the height and culmination of Iraq as a regional power and introduce the United States as a permanent actor with no proxy between it and Iran.

After the United States led the coalition to first defend Saudi Arabia and then oust Iraq from Kuwait in 1991, it struggled to develop a new policy to pursue its interests in the region. In 1993 the United States instituted a policy known as Dual Containment toward Iran and Iraq in an effort to isolate both countries and contain their regional ambitions.[83] Throughout the 1990s the United States took military actions against Iraq in the form of physical containment. It instituted no-fly zones that degraded Iraq's military

at every opportunity in actions such as the air strikes in Operation Desert Fox. Both Iraq and Iran were isolated economically with trade and technology sanctions. To enforce its Dual Containment policy, the United States would now establish and occupy permanent bases in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other countries in the Persian Gulf.[84]

This containment policy culminated in 2003 when the United States invaded Iraq. The U.S. objective was to rid the region of an aggressive power that possessed weapons of mass destruction and ultimately to install a more peaceful and democratic regime. While the accomplishment of those objectives is still being fought for on the battlefields of Iraq, one consequence of the fall of Baghdad remains indisputable: the balance of power in the region changed with the United States assuming the role of regional hegemonic power with no contender.

With the decline of impending US influence in the region, this condition is rapidly changing. Through the pursuit of nuclear weapons, military modernization and increased capacity to create economic potential through external relationships with Russia and China, Iran has poised itself to be a rising power in the Middle East.[85] This combination of US decline and Iran's return as a challenger, changes the regional system from unipolar to bipolar. Because of this power shift, the rationality that is afforded to a hegemonic United States must give way to the rationality of viewing the region from that of a declining state in a relationship with a less powerful but rising Iran.[86] Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad summarized the recognition of the new relationship when commenting on the announced United States troop withdrawals in Iraq and Afghanistan; "at no time could Iran - on its own - have eliminated the threat

posed by Iraq as fast or efficiently as the Americans... It will be Iran - not Iraq - that will come from the smoke as the power in the Middle East and protector of all Muslims."[87]

Iran's current day actions and rhetoric reflect that it recognizes the hypocrisy between US policy concerning Iraq's 1980s chemical weapon usage and the modern dialog on the Iranian nuclear program. While contradictory, both of these actions serve to reinforce the dominant feature of conflict between the two states. The consequences on US credibility due to its support of Iraq in the 1980s may only be realized today. Institutions, like the United Nations, that are required in solving the Iranian nuclear issue were made impotent in a series of past actions to support Iraq's use of chemical weapons. If not addressed, this will constrain policy development in relation to a future war.

For the foreseeable future, stability in the Middle East will play out as a consequence of the US-Iranian relationship. This point was made clear in a January 2005 Interview on Iranian television. The former deputy commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps said; "The [Americans] eliminated the Taliban and Saddam. They conducted operations in Yugoslavia. Therefore, we are aware of the Americans' real power. Our country has unique capacities that no other power in the Middle East or in the Persian Gulf possesses. This is the ability to manage regional crises... If Iran wishes to cause turbulence... security in the region will change dramatically."[88]

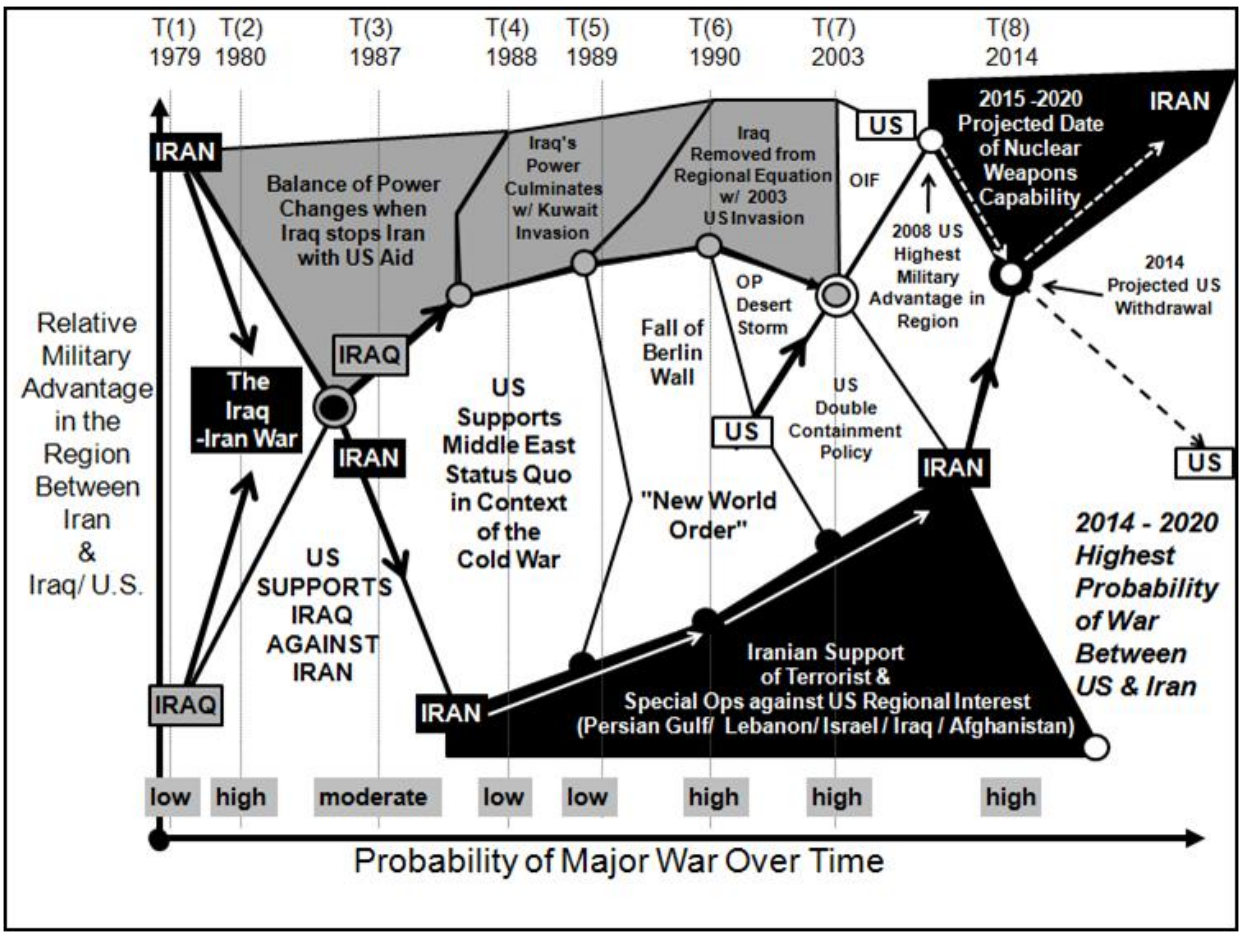

Figure 3: 2014 -2020: Highest Probable Time for Major War between US and Iran.

Figure 3 projects the path dependence of the United States, Iraq and Iran onto the relative military advantage model found in figure 2. Based on the predicted trajectory, policy development should address the critical juncture defined by the high probability of war found between 2014 and 2020 t(8).[89] This is the intersection of the imminent US withdrawal and the projected dates that Iran is to have the technology, intellectual capital and the infrastructure necessary for a nuclear weapon. If there is no change in policy, The United States is dependent on a pessimistic approach and more

inclined to initiate major war as a "now-or-never" attempt to shore up its waning security.[90]

Contributing Factors - Variables

Six contributing factors work together to determine which option is most likely to maximize the states' security. The three independent variables reflect the current situation of decline that contributes to the US policy in the Middle East. Combined together, the variables extrapolate the US-Iranian timeline events into parameters that will frame policy development. The variables are the initial differential of relative military power; the depth of decline in the absence of strong action; and the inevitability of decline in the absence of strong action.[91]

Since 2008, the decline of US power in the Middle East has had more impact on the choices that affect policy on Iran that any other factor. Furthermore, I argue that as US leaders acknowledge the decline and attempt to change the trend, they will find it logical to be the initiators of a war or crisis scenarios that will risk an escalation to war. In general, the greater the United States declines in the Middle East, the more likely it is to pursue risky policies.[92]

This paper in no way implies that this period marks the end of American exceptionalism. Yet, central to sound policy development is recognizing what limitations are put on US actions relative to its own circumstance in the strategic environment. The quality that defines those constraints is referred to as *decline*. This can be caused by deterioration in one or all of the economic, technological, and social advantages of the United States relative to another state.[93] Simply put, the tools that once sustained US superiority are losing their influence on others. Referred to as "entrenched stagnation," this form of decline is expected during harsh economic periods. Because it is

recognized as reversible, policy development regards decline as a variable.[94] If the decline constrains the desired policy to the point of unfeasibility, leaders can expend resources to change the variable and keep the desired policy goals.

Another form of decline that affects the United States is the problem of power oscillations among countries in the region. This is caused by the effect of success in other US regional policies relative to Iran. For instance, victory in Iraq manifests itself in the withdrawal of force structure from the region. Although desired, this still creates a loss in relative military power to Iran. If not reversed, this situation will leave the United States in a position of vulnerability. As forces are withdrawn, there is a decline in an ability to deal with Iran across the spectrum of policy options. To compensate, the United States will depend more on global strike or nuclear deterrence. These actions reinforce conflict trajectories and the threat of them encourages a nuclear capable Iran. In the end, US actions are limited to extreme hard-line options that increase the risk of war and decrease the chance of long term stability.[95]

Contributing Factors: Variable 1- Relative Military Power

2008 was the height of US military presence in the Middle East. At this time, forces allocated for the "surge" strategy were becoming operational in Iraq. Combat was increased by thousands of troops, as an additional division was committed to Iraq. During that September, there were four additional US Army brigades and two additional US Marine Corps regiments that were conducting transfer of authorities either in Afghanistan or Iraq. Although not counted in official reports because they were in transit, these 15,000 Soldiers and Marines were present and could have been used if required.[96]

Official counts had the US Central Command close to 294,355 troops under its control at the end of 2008.[97] Accounting for the noted redeploying units in transit, the addition of a carrier group changing out in the Persian Gulf and the arrival of a Marine Expeditionary Unit as floating reserve, the US military presence in the Middle East would grow to its apex of 317,355 during the fall of 2008.

Arguably the 1991 Gulf War would see a higher number of 'boots on the ground' at 325,000 troops in the region. What is important for this study is the *relative* power of a state's military. In 1991, that troop count would only account for less than fifteen percent of the total US military force. In 2008, the numbers would account for more than thirty-five percent of overall US land forces and almost forty percent of the total United States air, land and sea components. In relative military strength, 2008 would be the first time the United States had a force that large in a single combat theater since World War II.[98]

In geostrategic terms, 2008 would also serve as a window in time when the United States had a significant advantage over Iran by the placement of bases and military access to the region. With air and land bases to the west in Iraq, bases in the north and east supporting Afghanistan and a naval presence in the gulf to Iran's south, the United States would not have a better advantage relative to Iran than it had in 2008.[99]

Even with the recent increase of troops as part of the Afghanistan 'surge', the US capability to coerce Iran has declined since 2008. Since then, over twenty-nine bases have closed in the region. Troop numbers in Iraq have decreased forty-two percent and are down by thirty percent in the region.[100] Unrest throughout the Middle East in 2011 has air and naval assets deployed away from the Persian Gulf and towards the

Mediterranean. As states such as Egypt change governments, overall access to the region becomes questionable until new governments identify themselves as favorable to a US presence. Simply put, the United States no longer possesses the advantage in relative military power towards Iran that it held in 2008.

Even if troop numbers in the region remained the same, there would still be a degree of decline as the relative total number decrease. With projected Army and Marine troop cuts, of 27,000 and 20,000 and another 20,000 'nondepolyable' service members to be discharged, the trend of military power decline is expected to continue.

Contributing Factors: Variable 2- Depth of Decline & Constraints of the Economic Crisis

The 2007 financial crisis is considered by economists to be the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.[101] According to Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the national debt is the largest threat to US security. "Taxpayers will be paying around $600 billion in interest on the national debt by 2012." That's one year's worth of defense budget," he said, adding that the Pentagon will cut spending as well.[102] As the United States is in two wars, these unprecedented 'cut backs' are evidence of a decline in financial advantage as it relates to military power.[103]

If the US recession is not considered in policy development, the United States is at risk of being caught between Iran's future actions and a response limited by a weakened defense budget.[104] Seeking time to reverse the economic effects, US leaders may choose to seek conciliatory measures with Iran as a chance for low cost stability. Initially misinterpreted as a diplomatic positive step, history indicates that an undeterred Iran would eventually act to achieve its goals to weaken US influence and strengthen ties with competitors like Russia.[105] More systemic than choosing a 'wrong' policy, Iran's

actions in this case are a result of not considering the constraints that financial stagnation puts on US options.

In a strong economy, leaders would be less likely to seek savings from appeasement. If not considered, economic decline will ultimately be the cause of instability. Cost savings will be short lived as the United States will find it difficult to afford re-entering the region to reassure partners while deterring an empowered Iran.

The current economy also limits the United States to meet potential challenges posed by Iran in the future. For example, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has given more economic reasons relative to the nation's deficit for canceling programs such as the Air Force's F22, the Army's Future Combat System, or the Marine's Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle.[106] Very seldom are these cuts explained in relation to future threats they were developed to fight. In the end, the true potential of those investments can never be realized and future policy must be adjusted for the absence of the overwhelming military power that those programs promised.

Finally, the effects of economic insecurity can best be seen in how they manifest in the public will that is required to endure against an Iranian challenge.[107] Since the 2010 elections, there have been notable policy shifts in regards to the national security budget that show that the waning economic situation is having a power influence on how decisions are being made in Washington.[108] The assumption can be made that, absent a September 11th type terrorist attack, the required public support of a preventive war with Iran has shifted to domestic issues.[109] With this shift, the ability of the United States to seek purely hard-line measures to counter Iranian influence in the region declines.

Decline of US Credibility in the Middle East

Diplomatic influence in the region has diminished as well. With the admittance by the former US President and Secretary of Defense that the reasons for going to war in Iraq were flawed, US credibility in the Middle East has suffered. The former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs goes farther than saying it was a mistake.[110] "The fact is that we had Iraq contained and they were not a threat.[111]" He added, "There was absolutely no link between him [Saddam] and 9/11."[112]

Whether it was a well intentioned mistake or incompetence, the actions in Iraq have weakened US diplomacy in the Middle East. The United States is no longer in a credible position either to consider radical diplomatic options such as regime change in Iran or other types of coercive diplomacy. Either could prove militarily disastrous or start an unintentional war and jeopardize US interest in Iran or Afghanistan. Furthermore, military action might only serve to embolden Iran’s leaders and further radicalize the population's support of building nuclear arms.

Decline in credibility with the Iranian people began long before 2003. The 1953 coup permeates strategic discussions between the United States and Iran up to the current dialog. During the 1960s and 1970s, Iran's oil revenues grew considerably, and this rise weakened US influence in Iranian politics. Enjoying the advantages of Iran's success, the United States would visibly focus on strengthening the power of an Iranian state in comparison to focusing on the Iranian public. According to scholar Homa Katouzian, the 1953 coup put the United States "in a contradictory position of being regarded [by the Iranian public] as the chief architect and instructor of the regime," while "its real influence [with the population] declined considerably."[113]

The fact is, relative to its diplomacy, and specifically to its ability to use military power, the United States' capacity to influence the states and populations of the Middle East is affected by its past actions. This condition is not necessarily permanent. The depth of the influence decline is arguable. What is not open to question is the reality that it would be dangerous not to consider US historical engagement with Iran when gauging the present credibility of policy choices concerning Iran.

Contributing Factors: Variable 3- Inevitability of Decline

By considering the US-Iranian shifts in balance of power and the characterization of US military decline together, assumptions can be made concerning the inevitability of that decline. The associated times with these variables will delineate the parameters that will define what inevitability means to policy development. The first assumption is that military advantage is currently in favor of the United States and should remain that way until the 2014 troop withdrawals. The second assumption is that the United States is certain not to be in a military advantage by 2020. This is when Iran's military power relative to America's will be significantly enhanced by the predicted introduction of an Iranian nuclear capability. These dates also define the next critical juncture for policy. If opportunities for peace are to be made or military advantages kept, policies should be in place and implemented before 2014.

The inevitability of the variable is also defined by the continuation of the overall US economic decline predicted to last at least five more years. This amplifies military decline well into the future by the number of advanced military programs that have been cancelled with no replacement in research and development.

Contributing Factors: Variables - Conclusions

The military, economic and diplomatic influence of the United States in the Middle East has shown a significant downward trend for almost four years. With announced troop withdrawals and budget cuts that are projected to affect US development programs in the region, this trend will continue. The fact is that the cumulative effects of this decline puts the United States in a temporary condition of disadvantage in its relationship with Iran relative to what it was only two years ago. This condition will limit policy choices whether it is recognized or not.

By nature of being variables, the United States can change these time periods by actions it takes in policy implementation. For instance, a shift in a status of force agreement with Iraq to move withdrawals beyond 2014 would extend the risk window of a war with Iran. The 2020 date could also move if Iran were to experience sabotage or airstrike on a research facility. The decline in US influence in the region should be characterized as "certain,"[114] and the following assumptions are summarized for policy development:

- The United States currently holds a position of relative military advantage over Iran in the Middle East.

- Because of a decline in regional military presence and the constraints of a domestic economy, the ability of the United States to sustain that condition of advantage should start decreasing in 2014.

- Dependent on a trajectory that is reinforced by US withdrawal policy, US decline in the Middle East is seen as 'certain' and a transition in the balance of regional power to Iran is predicted to reconcile itself by

2020 based on the expected date that Iran can obtain nuclear weapons.

Contributing Factors - Constraints

Three constraints are now incorporated to predict the exact severity of the United State's policy choices and the associated probability of a war. The first constraint is the extent to which hard-line policies such as crisis initiation or containment accelerate or reverse the US decline. The second is the extent to which hard-line policies will increase the probability of war by inadvertent means and escalation. The final constraint is the probability of Iran attacking later should it be allowed to rise.

Contributing Factors: Constraints - Extent that Hard-Line Policies can Overcome Decline

The more policies options are expected to mitigate decline, the more attractive they will be versus the more costly act of war.[115] Based the trajectory that produced the current status quo, continued hard-line policies provide little prospect of lasting regional stability. In the extreme, the analysis of a choice to start a third war in the region only accelerates US decline.[116] There is no regional proxy to offset US relative decline as there was in 1979.[117] If the United States starts such a war, there is no evidence that the results of a war with Iran will overcome US regional decline. Although feasible until projected troop withdrawal dates pass, war with Iran cannot be considered an acceptable or suitable option when compared to other regional US objectives.

Strong overtures of Israeli and other Arab governments gives optimism towards the use of hard-line options short of war to be effective towards Iran.[118] The initiation of a crisis in the form of air strikes on Iranian facilities should be considered an acceptable and suitable policy option. Feasibility could be sought by pursuing new status of force

agreements with Arab states that would keep US air power in credible proximity of Iranian infrastructure. US influence could rise and even reverse US decline if diplomatic freedom of action was obtained through the international community in the form a UN resolution. Specifically, it should call for military action if Iran demonstrates that it has a nuclear weapon. Air strikes would serve as a unifying action to form a US sphere of influence in the region and reverse US regional decline.

This case is atypical in that what is normally considered a soft-line option has the effect of a hard-line policy. In this way, the option "Do Nothing" constrains the United States in relation to its decline much in the same starting a war would.[119] Israel and Saudi Arabia have made it clear that they will act if the United States does nothing. If there is no change in US policy, then this scenario is dependent on two choices the United States has already made. One is the security alliance that it has made with Israel. The second, because the United States has removed Iraq as the Sunni counter to Iran, it has made the other Arab nations dependent on US military power for perceived or real security. Because of ties to oil, other economic opportunities and power projection, these Arab states are in essence US protectorates. If either Israel or one of the Arab nations chooses to act, the United States will find itself in a war - not of its choosing and at a significant disadvantage. If the United States does nothing, Arab states have indicated they will seek new protectors to compensate for absent US power. Indications are that some would side with Iran, while others, including Israel, may look for assistance from competitors such as Russia. In both cases, US decline of influence remains in decline and could be expected to accelerate if no action is taken. The option of "do nothing" is not feasible, acceptable nor suitable for the United States.[120]

Contributing Factors: Constraints - The Probability of War by Inadvertent Means

The second constraint is the extent to which such hard-line policies will increase the probability of war through inadvertent means and escalation. The greater the likelihood that a hard-line policy will cause an inadvertent spiral to war, the less attractive the policy is.[121]

Because of changes in regional balance of power relationships and a condition of US decline, this is new ground for US policy makers in relation to Iran. Before the Balkan interventions of the 1990s, the conflicts between the United States and its rivals were for limited goals with limited means.[122] In the context of the Cold War, it was openly understood what the United States wanted from Iran in the language of diplomatic coercion. In turn, Iran knew how far it could go and the steps required in reversing an escalation with the United States. The fundamental element in deterrence messaging between states was present; expectations were known ahead of time.[123] Proxy wars, covert and terrorist actions or combat in domains such as the air or sea were tolerated in the context of an understood diplomatic norm. The combinations of the successes in the wars Balkan region and the September 11th terrorist attacks on the United States would change this.[124]

The United States has changed its norm in how it communicates with military force and its overall diplomatic language with regards to weaker states.[125] Since becoming the sole hegemon in the international system, the United States has based its reputation on maintaining the system that allows it to remain in power. It started this in a series of UN endorsed interventions and eventually with preemptive wars that have resulted in the breakup of the sovereign territory or a regime change with its rival states. In 2011 it is clear that US military operations against a chosen state - even for

humanitarian or protection purposes - will more likely end with changing the sovereignty status of that state. States should assume that if they are attacked, even in a limited form, by the US military that state survival or the survival of the regime in power is at risk. This is the new diplomatic language of the United States.

The United States may no longer want to pursue this line of diplomatic coercion and choose options that it once had in the 1980s. The United States' actions in 1990s and the 2000s communicate something very different and as a result have over committed the reputation of its military power in how it coerces others. Because Iran is a rational state concerned with its survival, it will logically accept this change in diplomatic language based on the US reputation to use military power in regime change. Even in the context of deterrence, Iran's survival demands that it respond to any application of US military power as it were a threat to Iranian survival. This condition limits what the United States can do with regards to Iran with military power unless it desires war.

It will take a considerable amount of time to change this condition. Until the United States and Iran come to a shared perception of what the balance of power will be in the region, policies such as a strong military show of force will have a very different effect than they did in the 1980s. The expectation should be that Iran's regime has the rational belief that it will be the next in the 'Axis of Evil' to be changed based on past US performance and threats. Because Iran's perception is that the next military action will be for its survival, hard-line policies will increase the probability of war by inadvertent means. While deterrence and containment policies are still acceptable, feasible and suitable, the military participation in such operations will be constrained in type, size and scope if peace is preferred.

Contributing Factors: Constraints - The Probability of Iran Attacking in the Future

The final constraint is the probability of Iran attacking the United States later should it be allowed to rise. This constraint considers both diplomacy and domestic processes on Iran's decision to attack the United States in the future.[126]

As the United States declines in power in the region, it is certain to find itself challenged by Iran. Before the 2008 "surge" period, Iran was found to be more than an obstructionist to US interests. Where United States and coalition force numbers were found to be inadequate for the Iraqi occupation and the following insurgency, Iran would risk war to challenge US influence.[127]

As impotent coalition force numbers began to try and consolidate gains in Iraq's major cities, Iran would insert itself where it could among the Shia majority. An early example of this was found in a 2003 Iranian Revolutionary Guard intelligence report marked Confidential that noted the passage of US forces in the city of Kut but says "we are in control of the city." Another Iranian report dated the same day would state: "forces attached to us had control of the city of Amarah and occupied the Baath Party headquarters there."[128]

On June 24th 2003, Iran would challenge the coalition by funding an operation that would kill six British military police in Majarr al-Kabir.[129] In August of that same year, the first explosively formed projectile of Iranian origin would be used to kill US soldiers.[130] By 2004, the United States would find itself openly targeting Iranian agents in Iraq. A raid of three Iranian "safe houses" in Iraq captured documents linking Iran to plots to kill members of the Iraqi intelligence service. A month later, Iraqi intelligence chief Mohammed al-Shahwani said "Documents were obtained... (showing) the Iranian regime is seeking... subversive acts to exacerbate Iraq's wounds and dominate it." He

added "A document (showed) that Iran allocated a budget to Badr Corps, a subversive Shia organization in Iraq, totaling 45 million dollars." By 2005, frustration towards Iranian influence would show in the statement of other Iraqi leaders. Basra's chief of police, speaking of Iranian influence: "All I can say is that 80 percent of our police officers do not obey my commands".[131]

The change in strategy and increase of US troops to 2008 levels would address the threat with kill or capture orders concerning Iranian agents.[132] Ultimately the Iranian threat in Iraq would decrease with the rise in US military power. Soon after, increases in Iranian sponsored attacks in Afghanistan were seen in places where US troop numbers were found to be inadequate.[133]

Attacks on vulnerable US military forces by Iranian agents and proxies are not limited to the current circumstances. On September 8th 2003, Judge John Bates of the United States District Court in Washington, DC would award $123 million dollars to 29 American victims and family members of Americans killed in the 1983 bombing of the US embassy and US Marine Corps Barracks in Beirut. The civilian court had determined that the bombing against the small US embassy and peacekeeping contingent was carried out by the militant group Hezbollah with the direction, approval and financing of senior Iranian officials.[134]

Based on these past circumstances, it can be assumed that Iran will exploit situations where the US military is vulnerable by use of force restraints required in operations such as a diplomatic show of force or humanitarian mission. Iran is also expected to follow its trend of exerting its influence where a lack of US force numbers defines vulnerability.[135]

Any policy that does not remove Iran as a regional power or its regime should expect an Iranian attack on US interests in the region as troop numbers decline. This is emphasized because current policy calls for small security cooperation contingents of US troops to be left to advise and assist Iraqi or Afghan militaries and in other countries in the region. It is difficult to predict how these attacks would escalate should Iran be allowed to have nuclear weapons. Therefore, even though war is neither feasible nor suitable to address regional issues, a potential nuclear armed Iran makes it unacceptable to rule out an initiation of war option.

Contributing Factors: Constraints - Conclusions

The preference that the policy decision maker imposes is the final constraint. US Administrations over many years have preferred peace over war. As seen in the attempts at the policy of engagement, this remains the same for the Obama Administration. The preference of 'peace' will now serve as the mechanism that will guide the policy development. It is a constraint in that it dictates that policy recommendations must simultaneously address three actions towards Iran. First, policy development must constantly attempt to reduce the probability of war. Second, policy is required to create a reality that alters the trajectory towards war. Finally, military operations should be conducted in such a way that peace is a certain and assured outcome.

The following summarizes the constraints on policy development that outline the parameters of the "art of the possible" in regards to US-Iranian relations:

- The preference of peace constrains policy development to constantly attempt to reduce in the probability of war. It also must create a reality that alters the trajectory towards war. If required military operations

must be conducted in such a way that peace is a certain and assured outcome.

- "Initiate War" and "Do Nothing" accelerate US decline in the region.

- "Initiate War" is not feasible or suitable because of an over commitment of US reputation and forces in the region. Yet, it would be unacceptable for the US to discard "Initiate War" because of the threat posed by a nuclear armed Iran. US is constrained to "Initiate War" as a last resort in accordance with international norms or it will experience significant regional and international decline of credibility.

- Policy choice "Do Nothing" is not an option because Israel will strike Iran and/ or other Arab states will seek protection from Iran or other US competitors. US regional influence will experience the most significant decline if it "Does Nothing."

- Policy choices "Crisis Initiation" and "Reassurance" have a strong probability of reversing or mitigating US decline in the region.

- Chance of war with Iran by escalation has increased significantly since 1980s. Because of a reputation of regime changes, The US is constrained in the type, size and scope of deterrence options.

- Expect Iran to attack if allowed to rise. Scope and size of attacks concurrent with US decline in region. Because of this, US is constrained to not accept a nuclear armed Iran.

Policy Options

Even after the failure of the 2009 Engagement Policy, some argue that a conciliatory approach might not only reverse Iran's nuclear aspirations, but also improve the overall relationship.[136] Others offer that US concerns stem from the nature of Iran's regime. In this view, new regimes formed from opposition groups would produce strategic benefits beyond reducing the nuclear threat, including an end to Iran's obstruction of Arab-Israeli peace.[137] A third view is that Iranian nationalism produces a common view on Iran's security and that a new regime would not align with the United States due to fear of an increased US influence and un-Islamic culture in their lives.[138]

Changing the trajectory to war with Iran is no simple matter. Soft-line and hard-line policy options supporters respond to different elements of the Iranian Regime. Soft-line supporters essentially focus on the immediate and practical consequences of actions towards Iran. Hard-line supporters are engrossed in the radical revolutionary side of the regime. The approach of each captures one characteristic of the Iranian problem but misses a part of what influences Iranian behavior. If it is to succeed, American strategy must be informed by the impulses of both tendencies that guide Iranian policy.[139] The goal of this section is to identify and examine the five basic options described in foreign policy development. From this, a set of actions can be sequenced and arranged in such a way that offers judgment on the best chance to alter Iran's behavior.

Policy Option 1: Initiate War - Use the U.S. Military to Achieve Regime Change

Supporters of regime change argue that Iran's government threatens the United States, Israel, and vital US interests in the Middle East. Not to be underestimated, Iran clearly seeks a greater role in the region and it will not be dissuaded from pursuing

nuclear weapons. The claim is that Iran's revolutionary ideology is incompatible with peace and cooperation.[140] The United States must recognize that the only guarantee of stopping Iran's hostile intentions is to change its government completely.[141]

The assumptions for this option are that Iranians deserve the liberties inherent in a democratic system. With or without nuclear weapons, the current government in Iran will remain a danger to the United States and the Middle East. Another assumption would be that Iranians would feel positively towards the United States after we help them overthrow their regime.

History tells a different story. As in 1953, any attempt to overthrow the regime will unite the Iranian people against the United States. There is not a significant opposition group to lead the effort, thus regime change is destabilizing. Pursuing it only increases an Iranian desire to build a nuclear weapon.[142] There is no doubt that regime change has a high probability of an early military success like the ones seen in Afghanistan and Iraq. As those cases have proven, regime change does not ensure a friendlier Iran.

Yet, a nuclear-armed Iran is unacceptable. While not sought as a first option, "Initiate War" for regime change must remain on the table in the form of a deliberate and escalated initiation of a crisis response of limited means and objectives. Plans should begin with rapid punitive strikes against regime infrastructure and then attacks to destroy an Iranian military capability such as its naval forces. If Iran still refused to bend, regime change must be threatened to make soft-line policies more acceptable alternatives.[143]

Policy Option 2: Crisis Initiation - Use Military Action to Destroy Iran's Nuclear Facilities

Clearly seeking nuclear weapons, the threat from Iran is real and it is immediate. Supporters of a limited strike state that the United States must act to destroy Iran's

nuclear facilities and reduce Iran's ability to counter-attack.[144] If Iran gets nuclear weapons it might use those weapons against Israel, an important US ally in the Middle East. As a state sponsor of terror, Iran also may pass nuclear weapons on to groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. Additionally, an Iran further emboldened by nuclear weapons will pose an additional danger to the fragile democracy in Iraq. An Iran with nuclear weapons is a serious threat demanding serious and immediate action.

There are two assumptions in for this option. First, Iran's nuclear program is intended as a basis for developing nuclear weapons and that makes Iran a danger to US national security. Given the US-Iranian history, a nuclear capable Iran would be more dangerous than other nuclear state including Pakistan, India, and China. Finally, threats from Iran towards Israel are not empty ones and should be taken seriously.

The problem with this option is that it is fueled by a story-line that is very selective in its details. The fact is that the United States has been the aggressor in the past. Historic trends show that Iran is likely only to attack if it is threatened.[145] Opposite from what the media reports, identifying all of the Iranian nuclear sites will be difficult, as the United States does not have the required intelligence. This makes complete success in eliminating all of Iran's nuclear facilities highly unlikely.[146]

A limited military strike will not stop Iran from trying to acquire nuclear weapons. As stated, the very threat of military intervention makes Iran more likely to try to acquire them.[147] Even just entertaining the idea of strikes and publicly stating it has increased distrust. Iranian officials have said they will retaliate against any military action.[148] Certain to destabilize gains in Iraq and Afghanistan, Iraqi Shiite political groups sympathetic to Iran should be expected to attack US military forces in both countries.[149]

There are other costs to deliberately entering a crisis. When initiating a crisis, states put their reputations on the line. Actions such as implementing deterrent options, recalling ambassadors, and military training maneuvers have high credibility cost. Meaning that if a state takes such actions and then back down, other states may perceive it as weak. Actions with high credibility cost send signals revealing a state's true resolve. Since weak actors are less likely to take such actions, challengers can update their beliefs about a defender's toughness, and thus back away before things go too far.

There is downside to this: actions with large credibility cost make it harder for states to make concessions within a crisis. This constrains the policy development of negotiated solutions that may be favored over war. In short, reputations may get overcommitted. The crisis then transforms actors who wanted peace into deadlock actors, who prefer war not only to the old status quo but also to any compromise.[150]

It should be assumed that Iran paid attention to what the United States did to the regimes of Iraq and Afghanistan. This should lead policy in a direction that recognizes that Iran will not see a change in US Presidents as a change to a new norm in how the United States deals with rival states. The fifth pathway to war is a very dangerous reality even if peace is preferred. Based on a US reputation of regime change, Iran cannot afford not to act strongly if faced with a US challenge.[151] Iran would be in serious risk if it did not consider a US attack as a survival situation for its regime.

Policy development must consider this as an over commitment of its reputation and that Iran will no longer see escalation as an option in its dealings with the United States. Policy makers wanting to bring back the US military's role to support "soft"

diplomatic options must expect that Iran will misinterpret them and respond in a way that reflects its survival interest. In the end, the true cost of this over commitment in Iraq and Afghanistan is that the United States has lost the ability to choose hard-line containment and deterrence options short of war to modify Iran's behavior.

However, as the trajectory indicates, a crisis with Iran is coming. Better to deal with Iran while the US forces in the region are credible. Waiting for the international community to act collectively or for sanctions to have more effect would mean giving Iran plenty of time to develop nuclear weapons. To mitigate the risk associated with time, limited attacks would not have to be limited to air strikes. Sabotage in the form direct action, cyber-attack or the assassination of a key scientist could be measures to push Iran's nuclear capable date beyond 2020.[152] If tied to clear and measurable diplomatic messaging, these actions also increase US credibility with regional allies and partners.

Policy Option 3: Diplomatic Deterrence and Containment - Tighten the Noose

Supporters of a deterrence and containment options recognize that Iran’s nuclear program is a threat but maintains that there is time to address the issue. This party argues that military action of any kind will only embolden Iran’s leaders and further radicalize the country towards a nuclear weapon.[153] Instead, the United States should take the broad approach of multilateral diplomacy, using both hard-line and soft-line measures to change Iran's behavior.[154] The threat of a nuclear strike or the continuations of sanctions are examples of deterrence and containment actions. Only a concerted effort to work with the Security Council and hold dialogue with Iranians over the real cost to them if they choose to continue will lead to resolution of the issue of enrichment facilities.

There are three assumptions that enable this policy option to be acceptable. First, Iran will desire to cooperate. The second assumption is that Iran will find it rational and necessary to develop nuclear weapons the more it is threatened by the United States. Finally, multilateral diplomacy is the most effective and least dangerous way to deal with Iran.

The issue here will be the same as it has been in the past, the international community will never agree on a single solution. As the Security Council attempts to deal with the problem, Iran will take advantage of the time and develop a nuclear weapon. Trying to engage with a regime that supports terrorism and asymmetric attacks on US interests only encourages rogue behavior.[155] Iran has used diplomacy as a cover to mislead the international community, while developing its nuclear capabilities. The sanctions, UN resolutions, and other deterrence measures imposed have not worked thus far.[156] Iran has responded in the past to hard-line policy.[157] Trying to affect the behavior of both the radical clerics and the president in Iran, when it is unclear where central power is really held, complicates diplomacy so that it may be impossible.[158]

Policy development should recognize that the physical aspects of containment and deterrence hold enormous risk as well. The main origin of the Iran Flight 665 accident was attributed to the alert status of the forces conducting operations in support of US containment in the Persian Gulf.[159] Given that this accident occurred in the context of the Cold War, it is understandable how it did not lead to an inadvertent war. Under present conditions it is also understandable that a nuclear capable Iran would behave differently in this situation. Deterrence and containment policies presented as alternates to war could create the circumstances that caused the shootdown of the

civilian airliner. Policy development is informed by recognizing that military coercion used in the pursuit of peace can escalate quickly to an undesired war.[160] With two powerful militaries close in proximity and on heightened alert, an accident can cause consequences beyond the control of their governments.

But for US interests to survive in the region, this option must be considered as a main medium in how to deal with Iran.[161] Although unclear on its feeling towards the United States, Iran's huge youth population has a favorable attitude about the use of diplomacy towards the US. Anything but diplomacy will alienate Iran's youth and produce another generation of suspicion and hate.[162] Iran is probably nine years away from developing a nuclear weapon. The United States has the time to muster a worldwide diplomatic effort and keep its influence in the region without having to keep a large military force.

Policy Option 4: Do Nothing - A Cold War in the Middle East

'Do Nothing' must at least be contemplated in that it ensures an expected survival of US influence in the region will remain above zero. But with the US regional decline defined by a withdrawal date, can the United States afford another long and costly Cold War type scenario? Adlai Stevenson proposed a variant of this option during the Cuban Missile Crisis, arguing that the risks involved in any campaign to coerce the Soviets to withdraw their missiles far outweighed the risks of learning to live with those missiles.[163] Just as in that case, the reality of an overall US nuclear deterrence would in fact make the risks of accepting an Iranian nuclear weapon relatively low.[164]

Predicted from current international rhetoric, an article in the Atlantic illustrates how the United States may find itself down this pathway to war. The article describes a probable scenario if sanctions or deterrence do not stop Iran from realizing its nuclear

goals. “The Israeli defense minister... will telephone counterpart at the Pentagon, to inform him that his Prime Minister... has just ordered the Israeli air force to fly east toward Iran”[165] The growing conclusion among Israeli leaders is that it must bomb Iran to eliminate the annihilation of the Jewish State.

Supporting the idea of an Israeli strike, an Arab minister said, “This is not a discussion about the invasion of Iran. We are hoping for the pinpoint striking of several facilities.” Saudi Arabia has also supported an attack but wants the Americans to conduct it so they would not be seen as partnering with the Israelis. "If the choice is between allowing Iran to go nuclear, or trying for ourselves what [the United States] won’t try, then we probably have to try,” the official added.”[166]

If attacked, the assumption is that Iran would defend itself and war would begin. Limited or not, alliances and security arrangements that have reinforced an entrenched opposition to Iran, would soon have the United States attempting to obtain its goal of ridding Iran of a nuclear capability. Most of the decisions that will take the United States down this path to war have already been selected. The security agreements with Arab states and Israel and harsh sanctions that commit the US reputation to a non-nuclear region are actions that have already contributed to an outcome not yet realized. The only choice to be made that would raise the probability of war in this scenario would be to choose to do nothing

Iran is not the Soviet Union and Israel has said that it will not tolerate the US 'doing nothing.' To do nothing in this case means the United States is abdicating the position to dictate terms and steer the dialog. For its own survival, Israel thinks it must to attack if the United States sits on the sidelines. It can be predicted that US influence in

the region would not survive to remain significant once it resigns its leadership role in the process. This option is not feasible.[167]

Policy Option 5: Reassurance and Conciliation: Normalize Relations with Iran

Proponents of the option of appeasement without preconditions, describe the US-Iranian relations as frozen in time. Since 1979, the United States has refused to have diplomatic relations with Iran. For the past thirty years, the United States has carried out a provocative and ineffective campaign of intimidation and containment. Supporters of conciliatory measures contend that the United States will gain more if it treats Iran with the respect it deserves as a regional power.[168] The United States has an opportunity to recast its relationship with Iran, develop trade between the two countries, and increase US oil access.[169]

Over time the United States can build a cooperative relationship with Iran and address issues of mutual concern. The United States has experienced making such bold moves, such as when Nixon made overtures to China in 1972. The result was a restoration of normal relations seven years later. Refusing dialog with an adversary does not achieve the possibility of creating an alternate reality where normalization could even occur. The United States must stop threatening Iran and instead take bold new steps to engage Iranians economically and diplomatically.[170]

The assumption for this policy option centers on the fact that Iran's suffering economy is contributing to Iranian discontent and fuels a perceived need to develop nuclear energy. The first assumption is that if the United States threatens military action against Iran, this need for nuclear energy will make it easier for Iran to build a nuclear weapon. Any immediate prosperity from the new relationship will bring stability and the

realization that cooperation could bring better conditions. The final assumption is that the Iranian people want a better relationship with the United States.

The true merit in this option is that it will force Iran to show its true intentions. President Ahmadinejad has stated that his main goal is to improve his country's domestic situation.[171] The United States would also see if the indications of a pro-American sentiment really existed among the Iranian people. This approach has worked with China in the past; it would at least preserve US influence in the region while it was being worked through. In the end the merits of this option would open the door on Iran's intentions and elevate the issue to the international community allowing the states that will be truly threatened by a nuclear Iran (Russia, Europeans, Turkey...) to take ownership of the issues.

Recommendations

The Obama Administration currently views Iran as a major threat to US interests. This insight is generated not only by Iran's nuclear program but also by its military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, assistance to the Palestinian group Hamas, and to Lebanese Hezbollah. Yet, nobly the President holds to a preference of peace.[172]

The following recommendations start with the belief that the risks posed by Iran going nuclear must be prevented. To do this, The United States must consider extreme measures from the hard-line or soft-line choices. Recommendations include the possibility of going to war with Iran to accomplish that goal. Yet, they also assume that the United States will meet with Iran without conditions but always applying pressures that reward or punish Iranian behavior. Iran must recognize that the United States is no longer imposing preconditions and that it is able to successfully orchestrate pressures while offering accommodation.[173]

Although a start point, the United States must still satisfy the three requirements needed to alter the path to war. These three requirements are to create an alternate reality for a future relationship; reduce the probability of war; and continue pressures that ensure advantage is retained in the region. An alternate future is created by giving Iran a door to walk through that has tangible and timely gains that are meaningful to the Iranian people. The probability of war is reduced by focusing on the Iranian leadership and presenting them what they stand to lose in a way that does not humiliate their country. These requirements will be support by measures that communicate the real cost of pursuing the nuclear option. Pressure will be constant and focus on true vulnerabilities that make Iranian leaders to seriously consider the alternatives to war.

Recommendation 1: Creating an Alternate Reality - Normalization

To pursue peace or expect the Iranians to quickly respond, fails to respect that peace is just as hard to obtain and maintain as waging and winning war. As demonstrated in 2009, constructing a strategic architecture relying solely on peaceful engagement does not allow for the required transition of *normalization* to occur. Normalization refers to the process through which the basic interactions that define 'normal' international relations between countries are introduced to the relationship over time. An example of this would be to work to reestablish embassies in the capitals of each country. Normalization refers to small but significant measures that would reframe the relationship so that, at a minimum, the United States and Iran could communicate as normal states do.

While there would be no preconditions to an offer for normalization, the following agenda derived from the enduring concerns of both countries would guide the process:

- Iran wants recognition of its legitimate security and regional interests, a commitment to accept the regime and give up effort to change it, a recovery of its frozen assets, and an end to economic embargoes, and the right to have civil nuclear power.[174]

- The United States wants Iran to give up its pursuit of nuclear weapons, its support for terrorist groups and militias that threaten or hold existing government hostage, and its efforts to prevent Arab-Israeli peace.[175]

Normalization should be initiated through direct, secret back channels. This secrecy will protect each side from premature exposure and would not require either to publicly explain the move towards normalization until it was ready.[176] Even if this fails, to attempt this process will be important to reveal Iran's true intentions and move on to more hard-line policies with international support. By coordinating a package of inducements with other countries and making it public at the right time. The goal would be to build pressures not to forgo the opportunity that has been offered, while also ensuring that the onus is put on Iran for creating a crisis and also for making conflict more likely.[177]

An attempt at normalization will be crucial if the United States is to go to war or initiate a global strike on Iran at a later date. The current state of US credibility in the region and among the international community requires any military action to be seen as a last resort. The public declaration and attempt to normalize will enable future military action with legitimacy in domestic and international audiences.

The problem is that the normalization process takes a long time to unfold and the certainty of war with Iran between 2014 and 2020 may not make that possible. This

problematic fact and how it relates to strategic action is the central point that defines the risk that US leaders incur with a preference to peace. Both in seeking to explain the problem of Iran and in the search for explanations, the United States focused on immediate and rapid fixes like engagement. In the year that was lost, more time was lost and thus more risk was assumed. This is why it is critical to gain time by simultaneously reducing the probability of war while attempting to normalize relations.

Recommendation 2: Reducing the Probability of War - Conflict Termination

If customary diplomatic communications were existent between the United States and Iran, then conflict prevention measures would be an appropriate means to reduce the certainty of war. This would serve to reduce or erode the actions that reproduce conflict and create the required time for normalization to alter the trajectory of war. Yet, the high intensity that distinguishes the current US-Iranian conflict and the absence of the required diplomatic mechanisms makes conflict *prevention* impossible.

The recommendation is to augment an offer to formally normalize relations with an attempt to enter into a process of cessation of hostilities. While the elements required for conflict prevention are absent, the fundamentals of conflict termination could create a time dimension favorable for normal relations to exist. A three phased strategy, conflict termination would also serve as a medium to determine the seriousness of Iranian leaders to negotiate.

The first phase would be an offer for an informal truce or ceasefire that would accompany the secret envoy to start the process. The ceasefire would be characterized as temporary and limited within a geographic area. The terms would be open to negotiations with Iran as to invite ownership and encourage success by not expecting too much too fast. In secret, the terms would be made and monitored. The feedback

from this would allow for reinforcing actions to be planned out to reward changes in behavior that moved towards normalizations.

Once a degree of seriousness is verified, a formal armistice would be publically offered to Iran that supports the pressures and credibility of a decision to go public with a policy of normalization. Under International Law an armistice is a legal agreement in which "all fighting ends with no one surrendering" and it applies to conflict as well as defined war. The armistice's duration would not be not fixed and the United States or Iran could resume fighting as they chose, but with proper notifications. At that point, to continue the trajectory towards war would be a choice. Notify the other of hostile intents or conducting covert action would hold the weight of breaking a treaty. Within this process itself, conflict could at least be recognized as within the 'normal' boundaries of the international system.

Although not a precondition for talks, as time went on and behaviors were verified, the issue of nuclear weapons could be brought up as a term in armistice negotiations. This would serve to make it clear that the United States saw the position of a nuclear weapon as a precursor to war with Iran. This would also allow Iran to use the formalities of the armistice to separate the issue of civil nuclear power and nuclear weapons. If at a later date a nuclear weapon was discovered, credibility of a US attack and would be reinforced and intensified by the agreements of a formal international agreement.

This can only be accomplished if the rulers in Iran are prepared to embrace a normal relationship with the West.[178] The final phase would be to test this attitude by asking for a public intent to work towards a more binding treaty to formalize at least the

acceptance of an idea that outlines a series of reciprocal measures leading to a step-by-step improvement of relations. The United States might even agree after the initial phase to take a few symbolic steps first, provided they are followed by scripted Iranian moves in a time frame clearly relevant to the initial action.

Recommendation 3: Reduce the Probability of War - Reverse US Economic Stagnation

The third recommendation is grounded in the basis that any degree of improvement in the US economic concurrently reduces the risk of war with Iran. The higher the degree of reversal in stagnation, the more significant the impact on the constraints of limiting US action towards Iran would be. The opposite logic also applies, if economic decline accelerates, the acceptance of a decision to attack Iran before it could exploit that advantage increases.

Understanding this is a complex and emotionally charged issue, the facts remain that if the United States wants to continue to remain in a position of advantage in the region and benefit from that position it must improve its economic situation. The recommendation here is that senior US military leaders, specifically the Joint Chiefs, begin to echo the Chairman's call for the economic situation to be seen in the context of national security and address it with the seriousness of that context.

Recommendation 4: Retaining Regional Advantage - Containment and Reassurance

Until Iran's intentions are revealed regarding how they would act towards normalization and conflict termination, the United States should continue to pressure the regime by pursuing international containment through sanctions and embargoes. Just as no conditions means that Iran does not have to pay to sit at the table, a meeting does not demonstrate the actions required to change the mind of the US population and the international community. Accompanying an offer to normalize relationships should

be a clear offer of real reassurances if Iran chose to enter into a process of normalization.

There is clearly room to do much more to tighten the economic noose around Iran and sharpen the choices the Iranian leadership must make. If chosen, this must be done in such a way and accompanied with reassurances that convince Iranian leaders that we do not seek their humiliation. Pressure that humiliates, meaning admission of defeat, is likely to make it easier for hard-liners to argue that giving in to it will eventually lead to regime change.[179] President Ahmadinejad appeared to make this very point in responding to his critics on why Iran should not take one step back in our confrontation with the arrogant powers regarding our nuclear program, we would have to keep taking more and more steps back till the very end."[180]

If US allies believe that it has not explored all diplomatic options, the United States should be prepared to undertake a serious effort of joint diplomacy. And, at least theoretically, there should be a community of interest. The European states will be the first victims of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and of Iranian medium-range missiles. As a nuclear power, Iran will in the long run prove far more threatening to Europe and Russia than to the United States.[181]

Recommendation 5: Communicating the Cost of a Nuclear Weapon - Deterrent

The basic objective of deterrence towards Iran should be to prevent it from developing nuclear weapons and to alter its destabilizing policies in the region. In the aftermath of the US National Intelligence Estimate's failure to identify Iran's continued uranium enrichment, it is unclear whether the United States has the means and leverage to alter its behavior. Yet, to date, Iran's vulnerabilities have not been threatened in such a way that has caused great concern either.

Iran's vulnerability manifests itself in the fact that its oil output is declining at a time when its domestic consumption is rapidly increasing. At present, Iran is falling more than 300,000 barrels per day below its OPEC export quota because it simply cannot meet it. When one considers that Iran derives 75 percent of its export income from its sale of oil, and those revenues provide at least 75 percent of the government's total revenues, it is not hard to see the potential. "Oil is as important as the nuclear issue; it will affect the very survival of the regime."[182] Outside of the already imposed sanctions effecting oil income, the recommendation is that the United States should clearly state that Iranian oil infrastructure will be targeted in the calculus of Iran's behavior.

At the first indication that verifies Iranian behavior that is not favorable to normalization, oil infrastructure should be destroyed in addition to strikes on nuclear research facilities. It is unclear if this will produce a change in Iran's behavior. What is clear is that there is an opportunity to take advantage of an Iranian decline in economic power in addition to attacking the potential power posed by a nuclear weapon.

Until Iran's behaviors can be evaluated or the timeline to war extended, the success of containment and reassurances is greatly enhanced if the reduction in military forces in the region is temporarily stalled or reverse. The second part of the recommendation is that the United States must maintain a force structure in the region to provide credibility to diplomatic dialog. This would reassure partners and allies that the United States was still a leader in the region and that any action against Iran should take place in the context of that leadership. The United States should seek to change the variable of the 2014 withdrawal date and thereby change the nature of the constraints that a smaller force imposes.

The final part of the recommendation is that the strategic orientation of US regional force posture should reflect the impending threat imposed by a shift in regional power. The United States' goals and objectives for the region should reflect the threat of Iran and not just the critical but not vital interest in Iraq and Afghanistan. To do this the United States should rework status of forces agreements with Iraq and Afghanistan to reflect this priority and adjust force levels that mitigate the risk of a hasty decline and the high probability of an Iranian challenge.

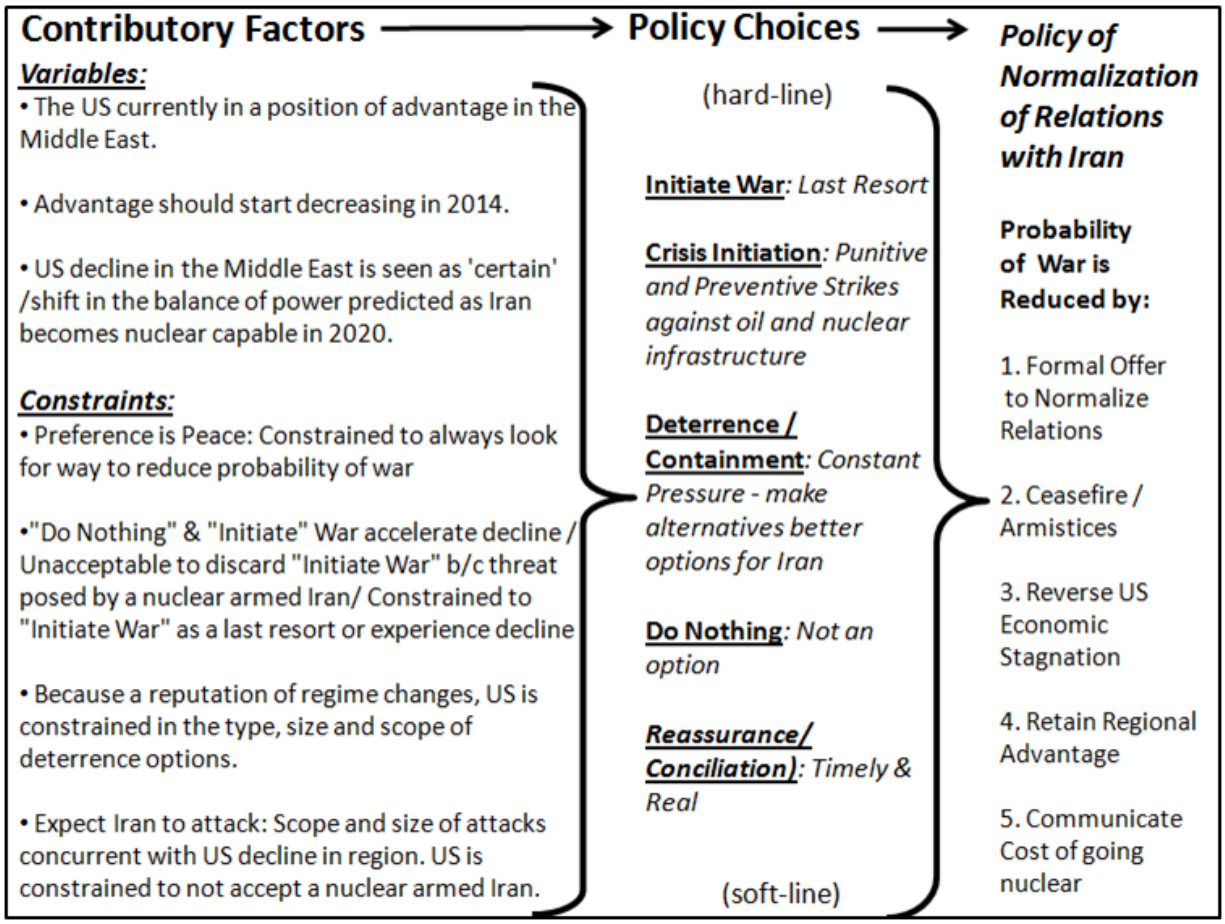

Figure 4: Policy of Normalization.

Conclusion

In combination, these recommendations end the image of Iran as a victim of US aggression. It also does not leave the impression that America has caved in and

effectively given up as talks begin. More importantly it does not convey the message that negotiations can provide a legitimate umbrella under which nuclear weapons can be pursued.

There are few nations in the world with which the United States has less reason to quarrel or more compatible interest than Iran. Although dominated by conflict, the US-Iranian history also possesses events that symbolize the friendship between the two countries. These events and the opportunities they present are not dependent on one or two personalities. Foreign Policy will eventually come down to making choices in relation to this opportunity.[183]

Sometimes even the best efforts at statecraft do not work, and that may be the case with Iran. But before we can come to that conclusion, it is time to try a serious approach to policy development that neither rejects diplomacy nor acquiesces to the Iranians. Only by recognizing the current trajectory of conflict and formalizing efforts to stop it, can a consistent strategic architecture be constructed to serve as a basis for a cooperative relationship between Iran and the United States.[184]

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[23] For the sake of narrowing the scope of this research, a major regional war in this scenario is a war that is characterized by three attributes that are common in wars fought by the United States since the decade began: the United States will be rivaled against a regional power of some significance; the war will be an all-out conflict fought at the highest level of intensity only for the regional power - not the United States; and that the war will contain a strong possibility that the regime of the regional power could be eliminated. In this case, the future war in this case study will be for the survival of the Iranian regime and considered a limited regional conflict for the United States.

[24] All states in history have had to worry about their power positions relative to others. For classical realism, balances of power deter aggression, and wars are likely when one state possesses most of the power. Hegemonic stability theory rejects this. Equality between states is dangerous, since rising and near equal states will attack to gain status and benefits. This framework seeks to overcome the weaknesses of these theories by synthesizing their strengths into what Copeland calls dynamic differential theory, see Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Cornell Studies in Security Affairs, 2000), 4

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For the purposes of citation 38 Regional Balance of Power Statements:

Global: 0.47 - Unipolar

Europe: 0.2 - Multilateral

South America: 0.15 - Multilateral

Asia: 0.3 - Multilateral / trends is toward Bipolar (India & China): Multilateral

Middle East: Current: 0.6 - Unipolar trend indicates bipolar in the future

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